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SUBJECT: FRENCH SENATOR ON BIOTECH: FRANCE WILL SEEK TO BROADEN
REVIEW PROCESS DURING EU PRESIDENCY

REF: (A) PARIS 78 (B) PARIS 98

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On February 20, EMIN and AGR officers met with French Senator Jean-Francois Le Grand to discuss French perspectives on biotech. Le Grand, who played a key role in the QGrenelle consultative process that ultimately resulted in French invocation of the safeguard clause on MON810, questioned the long-term impact of agricultural bio-technology on the environment and bio-diversity. He called anti-biotech environmental activists Qcircus performers, underestimating in our view the impact such activists have on agricultural biotechnology in France and Europe. Le Grand said France hoped to advocate its Qnew modelQ on ag biotech Q giving voice to non-scientific stakeholders in decision-making on GMO approvals Q during its EU presidency. End Summary.

¶2. (U) A veteran Senator, Jean-Francois Le Grand is a member of the Committee for Economic Affairs and a member of the Parliamentary Committee for Scientific and Technological Affairs. He was chosen by the French Government to lead the biotechnology and biodiversity working groups in the QGrenelleQ environmental consultations of late fall 2007. Following these consultations, he chaired the interim biotech committee whose concluding report called for additional research on MON810, and subsequently led France to invoke the safeguard clause (reftels).

¶3. (U) Senator Le Grand expressed his concern with the unknown long-term environmental impacts of biotechnology on biodiversity. But he said he supported continuing both bio- and non-biotech research, such as developing new technologies for desired trait intensification (e.g. drought resistance, through natural crop selection). The latter method would be more readily accepted by French consumers and would help maintain biodiversity.

¶4. (U) Politically there was a need to broaden agricultural biotech assessments beyond the domain of scientists, to include socio-economic stakeholders who could help to create socio-economic assessments. Stakeholder communication -- broad horizontal communication between experts as well as vertical communication with consumers -- must also be expanded to provide total transparency and insure consumer confidence in the assessments, he thought. This was FranceQs Qnew modelQ and, he said, the French political goal is to transfer it to the EU to better harmonize biotech policy among the Member States. Le Grand said he expects President Sarkozy to announce an EU biotech summit during the French EU Presidency, perhaps in the early summer.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: As head of FranceQs interim bio-tech committee Senator Le Grand was roundly criticized by a number of Senators, and

scientists, for mismanaging the MON810 dossier. Senate amendments to France's draft bio-tech law giving scientists primacy in making GMO recommendations were a clear rebuff to his vision of decision-making based on broad stakeholder consultations. The draft law comes up for discussion in the National Assembly in early April and we can assume proponents of Le Grand's approach will hit back. Le Grand's description of anti-biotech activists as circus performers, rather than extremists, is all-too-common here and, in our view, considerably underestimates the impact such groups have on the debate. Their monopoly of the media, and portrayal of destructive objectives as noble defense of traditional agriculture, contributes to creating an extremely complex environment for rational dialogue.

STAPLETON